

SOLEC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PADDY TORSNEY

How does all of this relate to the tragedy in Walkerton?

Walkerton was a tragic situation which must not happen again. Canadians must be assured that they have access to clean and safe drinking water. The Government of Canada is pleased that the Province of Ontario has launched an inquiry into the events surrounding the Walkerton tragedy. Before we can make any further comment, we need to see the results from that inquiry.

SOLEC has looked at drinking water from a basin-wide, surface water perspective and found the surface waters of the Great Lakes to be among the best sources of drinking water in the world. 80% of the people in the Great Lakes Basin are served by Great Lakes surface sources for their drinking water.

What is SOLEC telling us about the overall health of the Great Lakes?

Had this question been asked 25 years ago, I would have told you that the health of our Great Lakes was seriously threatened by toxic chemical contamination. This SOLEC clearly demonstrates that we are collectively reaping the rewards of our efforts to clean up toxic chemical pollution. For example in one of our key indicator species, the herring gull, chemical contaminants are down by up to 90% since the mid-seventies. This gives me a great sense of hope and optimism for the future.

However, this SOLEC's findings related to biological pollution are of serious concern to me and confirm that our Great Lakes are in biological turmoil due to the number and variety of invasive species that have been introduced from other parts of the globe. Our old foe the sea lamprey is making a comeback in some areas. Relatively new invaders like the zebra mussels are having profound and expensive impacts and all indications are that more new invaders are on the way.

All in all the indicators are giving us a very mixed bill of health for the Great Lakes Basin.